DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 279 632 SP 028 620

AUTHOR Brogdon, Richard E.; Tincher, Wilbur A.
TITLE High Aptitude High School Students' Opinion of Career Choice.
PUB DATE 19 Nov 86
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association (Memphis, TN, November 19-21, 1986).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Career Choice; *High Achievement; High Schools; *High School Seniors; Sex Differences; *Student Attitudes; Teacher Recruitment; Teacher Salaries; *Teaching (Occupation); Teaching Conditions

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to ascertain the opinions toward teaching as a career of high school seniors who scored in the top 15 percent nationally on college admission tests. Responses to a survey questionnaire were received from 629 students (a 16 percent response). Open-ended questions sought opinions on what is attractive about a teaching career and what is unattractive, why another career field was selected over teaching, and how teaching would have to change for it to be attractive. Attractive features of teaching for these students included personal satisfaction, having an impact on students, fulfilling a sense of altruism and other extrinsic values. Unattractive features were: low salaries, lack of respect, fear of abusive students, conflict with irate parents, no room for advancement, and poor working conditions. Attractions of noneducation fields were interest in a specific field of study, prestige, reward, opportunity, and better utilization of talents. Teaching would be more attractive if salaries were improved, there were more prestige and community support, a change in student attitudes, more benefits, better working conditions, increased standards for teachers, and better teaching resources. A discussion of the results includes recommendations for recruiting high ability students into teaching. (JD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED279632

High Aptitude High School Students' Opinion of Career Choice

Richard E. Brogdon and Wilbur A. Tincher

Department of Educational Leadership

Auburn University

Mid-South Educational Research Association

(1986, November 19) Memphis, TN

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

R E. Brodgon

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Running head: HIGH APTITUDE

SP 028 620

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

High Aptitude High School Students' Opinions of Teaching as a Career Choice

Reports critical of American education have appeared at the national, regional, and state levels in the past few years, and a more critical report which attacks undergraduate education is on the horizon (Fiske, 1986). The most consistent and severe criticism relate to either the ability of persons admitted to and graduated from teacher education programs or the quality of such programs. Recommendations for reform fill these reports abundantly; they all demand an increase in the ability and competency of teachers.

At issue is the academic qualifications of persons entering teacher education: The best qualified persons pass up the opportunity to teach which, the critics argue, results in more opportunities in teaching for the less qualified. The most frequently cited index of quality is the college admission scores of high school seniors who say they plan to become teachers; their scores in the past were lower and have recently declined farther than have the scores of their peers planning to pursue other fields of study. The National Commission for Excellence in Teacher Education (1985) reports that "high school senior who said they planned to enter teaching scored in the bottom quartile of all those taking the American College Testing (ACT) program examination, and ranked fifteenth out of nineteen fields" (p. 5).

A recent study of Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores revealed that the less qualified entered education. The mean SAT scores for education majors was 812 as compared to 987 for engineering and 893 for all high school seniors ("Why Teachers Fail," 1984). Crews (1985) studied Georgia high school seniors' scores and found that persons entering teacher preparation programs averaged 759 on the SAT which was 100 points lower than the state average. Astin (1985) reports that students who are attracted to education "tend to be among the least well-prepared (least 'brilliant') of all college students" (p. 131).

While the goal of attracting highly qualified persons to enter teaching needs little or no documentation, two recent national reports discuss the problem. The report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) recommended that "persons preparing to teach should be required to meet high educational standards . . . " as one step to reform education in America. Kean (1986), in a discussion of policy studies of the National Governors Association's Task Force on Teaching, wrote: "We created a sense of urgency about the need for action and a political climate that made action possible. But . . . we still face problems of both quality and quantity in the teacher workforce" (p. 205). However, the situation is very complex, and many factors contribute to the difficulty in attracting highly qualified persons to teaching. Regarding recruitment, Kean (1986)

wrote ". . . we don't give enough attention to what motivates people to teach. Teachers care about the intrinsic rewards of teaching and the professional environment. . . . If we want to attract able teachers . . . we have to respond to what they care about" (p. 205). Further, while the birth-rate curve moves toward its apex in the 1990s, more young children will be entering schools; however, fewer 18 year olds will be available to enter teaching because of the low birth rate of the 1960s. Thus, education, a profession which traditionally receives fewer persons from the pool of highly qualified high school graduates than it needs, finds itself, because of external demographic and social forces, in a position of competing for a large number of graduates as the highly qualified pool decreases in size.

Attracting new teachers from the ranks of the most qualified will be a monumental task. In an address, "Who's Going to Teach Our Children?", Alton Crews, superintendent of the Gwinnett County, Georiga, school district, reported that the "cream of the crop" of teachers is leaving for employment in the private sector. He indicated that two airlines, Eastern and Delta, employed more female school teachers than did all of the schools in Georgia in 1981, and those teachers who opted for the private sector had the best grade point averages of graduating elementary majors that year (Crews, 1985).

If the most able seniors enter nonteaching fields, what are their opinions about teaching as a career choice and what factors/conditions would have to change to make teaching more attractive to them? The purpose of this study was to ascertain the opinions toward teaching as a career of high school seniors who scored in the top 15% nationally on two college admission tests and who during 1984-1985 submitted their test scores to the admissions office of a Southern land grant university. The two tests used were the ACT (American College Testing Program) and the SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test); the top 15% is defined as a score of 25 or higher composite ACT and 1050 or higher total SAT.

Method

High scoring high school students were asked to respond to the following:

a. In your opinion, what is attractive about teaching?

b. In your opinion, what is not attractive about teaching?

c. If you have decided on a field of study other than Education, why did you select it?

d. If you have decided on a field of study other than Education, how would teaching have to change to attract you?

These open-ended questions were attached to an attitude scale developed by Tincher and Brogdon (in press). The substance of their instrument was based on criticisms found in the literature, particularly the 1982 study of Page and Page. The questions were

mailed in May, 1985. A list of the "high scoring" seniors with their mailing addresses, ACT and/or SAT scores, and high school grade point averages, had been obtained from the University's admissions office. The list contained 4,868 names, which included 929 persons who had submitted both ACT and SAT scores. Elimination of the duplicates resulted in a population of 3,939.

The students were asked to provide basic demographic data: state of residence, age in years, intended college major, and their gender; and whether members of their immediate family had been or were an elementary or high school teacher. The students were asked if they would recommend teaching as a career to a brother, sister, or best friend; whether they would consider becoming a teacher; and if they had talked with an adult about teaching as a career.

They returned 629 (16%) usable responses. High school grade point averages of the respondents ranged from 2.50 to 4.0; 80% were 3.20 or higher, and 34% had received a perfect 4. Composite ACT scores ranged from 25 to 33 with a mean of 27.0. Of the 400 who reported ACT scores, 80% were between 25 and 28. Of the 229 total SAT scores reported, the range was from 1050 to 1380, with a mean of 1151.8; 80% were between 1050 and 1220.

While the majority of the 629 respondents resided in the southeast, 32 of the 50 states are represented in this study. Alabama had the largest number, 264 (42%), and 84% (529) were from

either Alabama or its contiguous states with Florida reporting 109 (17%), Georgia 90 (14%), Tennessee 57 (9.1%), and Mississippi 9 (1.4%). Over 99% were 17 or 18 years old; one was 16, on was 19, and two did not report their ages. The mean age was 17.6. There were 51% female, 49% male, and gender was not reported in three cases. The opinions were not analyzed by race, since over 99% of the 629 respondents were white.

Results

Student responses to the open-ended questions provided insightful perspectives into teaching as a career. Approximately 75% of the responses were no more than a sentence or two, and in many cases a single word appeared like a grunt from a disturbed sleeper. Usually these exclamations were: Salary! Status! Respect! or Discipline! The students' concern over teacher salaries was expressed in many creative ways; this issue was raised, with force, in response to every question. More about salary will appear later.

Question 1. What is attractive about teaching?

Females expressed more attractive attributes of teaching than did males. The two most attractive categories of teaching were concerned with the female's own personal reward or her ability to help children and youth. Reports that teaching was compatible with rearing a family were made by 171 women, with vacation and the schedules of teaching being mentioned most frequently. Seven

wrote about the availability of teaching positions, eight about the atmosphere and fringe benefits, one wrote "the salary is not too bad." Five women whose responses were slanted toward personal reward made strong statements, the gist of which was: Good teachers are scarce, I am good; therefore, I should teach because I can make a difference. Altruistic attributes--helping, caring, or being friendly with students--were mentioned 211 times; even women who reported later that education could not change enough to attract them found the opportunity to help others attractive. Other attractive features reported were the opportunity to pass on their knowledge, the love of a subject, a chance to gain the respect of students, useful preparation to become missionaries, and to allow them the opportunity to set moral standards for youth. Several women wrote that teaching would permit them to grow personally, and others thought associating with young people would preserve their youth.

Males selected many of the same attributes of teaching as females, but mention was made less frequently of these attributes. For example, only 114 altruistic responses were made, while 120 reports found job security, fringe benefits, and vacation/schedules of teachers attractive. Student/teacher interaction was attractive to 52 males, and 1 wrote, "a teacher can make a student a better person and give him a real reason for living." Several of the males (12) reported a fascination with

"passing on knowledge that they had found difficult to learn." One-third of the males (102) wrote that teaching was very important; one wrote "teaching makes a greater contribution to society than any other job." But, 42 others wrote that nothing was attractive about teaching and 18 males did not respond to this question. No males found the salary attractive.

Question 2. What is not attractive about teaching?

Females responded to this question more frequently than males, but salary was reported unattractive by 261 males and 258 females. Many students compared the teaching salary to the menial tasks of garbage collectors, and 1 male wrote that "after four years in college, the salary for such an important job is not worth it." One female wrote, "Salary is the worst of all aspects of teaching. I was personally raised in a home of two teachers. My entire childhood and teen years were spent always worrying about money." Other unattractive areas were respect/status, females 101 and males 66; safety from cruel or abusive students and conflict with parents, females 127 and males 90; the concern over being abused by students was expressed by a male who wrote, "Many students are criminals and crazy people; I wouldn't want to get my throat cut because I gave someone an F."; conditions, females 63 and males 30; advancement, females 38 and males 36; state control of the curriculum and teaching practices, females 19 and males 7. The poor teaching ability of current teachers and

lack of discrimination between good and bad teachers was mentioned by 19 females and 18 males; students in this sample view a small number of teachers as poor models with whom they would not associate on a regular basis. A female wrote "I have set higher standards for myself, and being a teacher does not meet those standards. Being a teacher does not seem to require much intelligence and knowledge, and I hope to use my knowledge to enhance my life."

Question 3. Why did you select a field other than education?

Males and females responded in equal proportion and kind to this question. They reported that a specific field attracted them, in many cases since childhood; that they had always loved . . . or their intended field offered "high salaries," had "prestige," was "exciting," was "rewarding," and provided "opportunity." Many mentioned that the chosen field allowed them to better use their "talents and abilities" (often mathematics or science).

Question 4. How would teaching have to change for it to be attractive?

Many reported that teaching did not need to change, and if their intended career did not work, they would consider teaching. One male engineering major wrote "salary is the only thing keeping me from teaching." To this question, salary was reported by males (240, 78%) and females (216, 67%) as the single change that would

attract them to teaching. Many students who wrote "I don't think any change could make me give up . . . but a better salary would help." Money was followed by prestige/respect and attitude of the public; support from parents and a more responsible attitude about learning among students; conditions, the buildings and equipment were mentioned; opportunities for advancement, the merit pay system was mentioned frequently. The "system," with administrative procedures and lack of teacher involvement in decision making cited as the problem, was mentioned many times. Several students (15) discussed this complex problem. They wrote about the relationship between money, public attitude toward the profession, and teachers' self-esteem, and they suggested a complete overhaul of the system starting with some combination of pay increases, enhanced prestige and respect, differentiation between good and bad teachers, and increased standards for all teachers. Also, some suggested pay differentials favoring mathematics and science teachers over other subject areas.

Discussion and Implications

Most studies of attitudes toward teaching have involved preservice teacher education majors, inservice teachers, or groups of high school and college students. The literature is nearly void of studies of attitudes toward teaching held by academically able high school or college students. The purpose of this study was to ascertain the opinions toward teaching as career of high

school seniors who scored in the top 15% nationally on college admissions test.

It is apparent that teaching was not held in very high regard if responses to the question "would you recommend others to enter teaching" is a valid index. Very few would recommend teaching to their best friend (26.7%), fewer to a sister (20.8%), and still fewer to a brother (10.6%).

The aspects reported to be "attractive" about teaching fell into four major groups: altruistic, personal satisfaction, having an impact on students, and selected extrinsic values. It is interesting that twice as many females as males responded with attractive features. Males and females responded to the "not attractive" question in similar fashion; the "not attractive" features reported were: low salaries, lack of respect, fear of abusive students, conflict with irate parents, no room for advancement, and working conditions.

The items that attracted students to a noneducation field were interest in a specific field of study, prestige, reward, opportunity, and better utilization of their talents.

What would make teaching more attractive? Males and females reported "improved salaries." Other factors or conditions that would need to be changed are: prestige of teaching, community support, change in student attitudes or the system which would enhance learning and eliminate disruptions, benefits, working

conditions, increased standards for teachers, and better teaching resources.

The criticism that persons entering teacher education come from the less able high school graduates is supported by this study since only 3.3% of the respondents had selected teaching as a career choice. On the other hand, perhaps there is hope of attracting more academically able students since one-fourth of the group reported they would consider being a teacher and another quarter of the sample were uncertain if they would. Many of this group had considered teaching and would teach if preconditions concerning money, prestige, and community attitudes were satisfied.

There are innumerable lists of recommendations for improving American education. The majority, if not nearly all, suggest the imperative of high quality teachers which usually translates into more academically able students entering teacher education.

The 16 recommendations of the National Commission for Excellence in Teacher Education's report entitled A Call for Change in Teacher Education (1985), although not dissimilar to recommendations that other groups and organizations have made recently and in years past, are worth serious review and consideration. Several of the recommendations relate directly to the findings of this study and address factors/conditions which will have to be changed to attract "better" students:

1. Policy makers must be willing to "bid" for the talents of young people.

2. A national recruitment effort should be targeted toward the most able teacher candidates.

3. Colleges/universities must develop and maintain an academic and cultural climate which will afford teacher education students status comparable to that of students in other professional programs.

4. There must be an active recruitment-of-minorities program.

5. Teacher education programs need to be strengthened.

6. Salaries must be improved.

7. Working conditions must be improved.

Without a doubt, if the teaching professsion wants to attract more able students, changes will have to occur. To paraphrase an old cliche: "Those who can teach, don't teach, or are frequently discouraged from doing so" (Lee & Pruitt, 1979). It appears that although the intrinsic values of teaching still abound for many, the extrinsic values, for the most part, are unsatisfying for the majority. If more "high aptitude" students are to be attracted to teaching, the profession will have to improve salaries, opportunity for advancement, social status, attitudes of students, parents, and the community at large.

References

Astin, A. W. (1985). Achieving educational excellence. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Crews, A. (1985, May). Presentation to the College of Education faculty at Jacksonville State University, Jacksonville, AL.

Fiske, E. B. (1986, November 2). Undergrad education overhaul urged. The Anniston Star, p. 17B.

Kean, T. H. (1986). Who will teach? Phi Delta Kappan, 68, 205-207.

Lee, J. F., & Pruitt, L. W. (1979). High school teaching: A humiliating profession. The Clearing House, 53, 195-197.

National Commission for Excellence in Teacher Education. (1985). A call for change in teacher education. Washington, DC: Author.

National Commission on Excellence in Education. (1983). A nation at risk: The imperative for educational reform. A report to the nation and the Secretary of Education. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Page, F. M., & Page, J. A. (1982, Winter). Perceptions of teaching may be influencing current shortages of teachers. College Student Journal, 16, 308-311.

Tincher, W. A., & Brogdon, R. E. (in press). Attitudes toward teaching of high aptitude high school seniors. Education.

Why teachers fail. (1984, September 24). Newsweek, pp. 64-70.